PSYCHOLOGICAL MAPPING AND PERFORMANCE PROFILING OF FIJI RUGBY SEVENS PLAYERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ACROSS ELITE, DEVELOPMENT, AND UNIVERSITY LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

Despite the sustained global dominance and profound cultural significance of Fiji Rugby 7s, the scientific underpinnings of player development within its unique ecosystem remain under-examined. This thesis addresses the critical need for an evidence-based framework to understand and enhance player performance from the athlete's own perspective. The primary aim was to conduct a comprehensive performance profiling of Fiji Rugby Sevens players, mapping the perceived gaps between their Current Performance (CP) and Ideal Performance (IP) across tactical, technical, physical, and psychological domains, and to comparatively analyze these profiles across Elite, Club, and University levels. The study employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design grounded in a pragmatist paradigm. Quantitative data were collected from 100 players using the Butler and Hardy's (1992) Performance Profiling tool. Concurrently, qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sub-sample (n=30), which were subsequently analyzed using Deductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Quantitative analysis revealed a universal and statistically significant gap between CP and IP across all cohorts (e.g., Physical Domain: $Z = -3.87$, $p < .001$; Technical: $Z = -3.23$, $p = .001$; Tactical: $Z = -2.80$, $p = .005$), confirming a powerful aspiration for development. However, the architecture of these gaps was not uniform, revealing a distinct developmental trajectory. University players prioritized foundational technical skills; Club players focused on refining execution under pressure; and Elite players shifted to high-level tactical and psychological optimization, with Elite Utility Backs exhibiting the most pronounced gaps. Qualitative findings provided critical explanatory depth, revealing a dichotomy where players identified strengths in tactical-cognitive skills (e.g., Game Awareness) but significant weaknesses in foundational, off-field habits, particularly in recovery, nutrition, and lifestyle management, often influenced by sociocultural factors. This thesis makes two principal contributions. Methodologically, it validates the convergent mixed-methods approach, centered on performance profiling, as a powerful diagnostic instrument for generating deep, actionable insights within a high-performance Pasifika sporting context. Practically, it provides a strategic roadmap for athlete development and identifies a critical structural void in the national talent pipeline, the unsupported transition from secondary school to senior representation.

The study offers an evidence-based blueprint for a formalized tertiary-level development pathway. By giving a voice to the athlete, this research provides a holistic, empirically grounded foundation for sustaining the future success of Fiji Rugby 7s.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

In the landscape of international sport, few phenomena are as captivating as the sustained global dominance of the Fiji Men's Rugby 7s team. For a nation of less than one million people, Fiji's consistent success, including multiple HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series titles, three Rugby World Cup Sevens championships, and historic back-to-back Olympic gold medals in 2016 and 2020, represents a remarkable achievement that transcends mere athletic accomplishment. The Fiji Women's team, the Fijiana, has also risen to prominence, securing a bronze medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, further cementing the nation's status as a powerhouse in the sport. This unparalleled success has made Fiji Rugby 7s an iconic global brand, celebrated for a distinctive style of play characterized by an exhilarating blend of speed, creativity, and unpredictable attacking flair.

However, rugby's significance in Fiji extends far beyond the playing field; it is a cultural cornerstone, deeply woven into the fabric of national identity. Introduced by British settlers in the late 19th century, the sport has evolved from its colonial origins to become a powerful, unifying force in a multi-ethnic society (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013; Schieder, 2012; Schieder & Presterudstuen, 2014). Regarded by many as a national 'religion', rugby is a comprehensive lifestyle that penetrates every level of society, played in villages, schools, and communities across the nation. It serves as a medium for expressing the Fijian identity, embodying principles of teamwork, discipline, resilience, and the celebrated "warrior spirit". This deep cultural integration has produced one of the world's highest per capita player registrations and has instilled a profound sense of passion and pride that motivates players to excel on the global stage (Connell, 2018; Guinness & Besnier, 2016).

This celebrated success, however, presents a critical challenge in the modern era of high-performance sport. Fiji's reliance on natural talent and cultural passion faces unprecedented pressure as competing nations increasingly leverage multi-million-dollar sport science programs, advanced data analytics, and highly structured athlete development systems. The risk of stagnation necessitates a strategic evolution from merely celebrating success to systematically managing and nurturing it. Answering this challenge requires a deeper, evidence-based understanding of the players themselves: their psychological attributes, developmental needs, and perceptions of performance.

This study employs Performance Profiling (PP), a client-led, humanistic assessment tool grounded in sport psychology, to address this. First developed by Butler and Hardy (1992), performance profiling provides a structured yet flexible method for athletes to articulate their perceptions of their abilities, empowering them to take ownership of their development. By utilizing this tool to examine the gap between a player's perceived Current Performance (CP) and their envisioned Ideal Performance (IP) across the tactical, technical, physical, and psychological domains of the sport, this research seeks to provide the first comprehensive, athlete-centered framework for understanding and enhancing player performance within Fiji's unique rugby ecosystem.

This study is therefore situated at the critical intersection of Fiji's rich cultural rugby heritage and the scientific demands of modern elite sport, seeking to safeguard and enhance a remarkable national legacy for years to come. This context underscores the urgent need for a systematic inquiry into the heart of Fijian rugby excellence, which forms the central problem of this thesis.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the immense success and deep cultural significance of Fiji Rugby 7s, a notable gap exists in the scientific literature regarding its players' psychological attributes and developmental needs. While the pressures of elite performance are well-documented, there has been no comprehensive, systematic assessment of how Fijian players perceive their own strengths and weaknesses across the core performance domains of tactical, technical, physical, and psychological skills.

The existing body of research on performance profiling has been applied to various sports (Bird et al., 2020; Butler et al., 1993; Butler & Hardy, 1992; Weston, 2008; Weston et al., 2011), yet there is a specific lack of studies validating its use within the unique, high-context cultural environment of Fiji. This represents a critical oversight, as the utility of a Western-derived, individualistic tool in a collectivist Pasifika culture is unknown. Consequently, coaches, practitioners, and the Fiji Rugby Union lack an evidence-based framework for understanding player-perceived performance gaps. This hinders the ability to design genuinely targeted and individualized training interventions that can optimize player development, enhance self-awareness, and sustain the nation's competitive edge.

As competing nations increasingly leverage multi-million dollar sport science programs and advanced data analytics, Fiji's reliance on natural talent and cultural passion, while

historically effective, faces unprecedented pressure. This necessitates the adoption of evidence-based frameworks to strategically manage and nurture its unique athlete pipeline.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting the first comprehensive performance profiling of Fiji Rugby 7s players across the talent pathway, aiming to provide empirical insights that can inform and elevate high-performance practices.

1.3 Purpose, Aims, and Research Questions

1.3.1 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to conduct the first comprehensive, mixed-methods performance profiling of Fiji Rugby Sevens players across the national talent pathway. The study aims to systematically map, compare, and interpret players' own perceptions of their performance, providing an evidence-based framework to enhance athlete development within Fiji's unique, high-performance ecosystem.

1.3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

To achieve this purpose, the study is guided by the following five objectives:

1. To quantify and compare the Current Performance (CP), Ideal Performance (IP), Mean Gap, and domain-specific Gap scores across Playing Levels (Elite, Development, University), Genders, Position groups, and Age groups.
2. To identify distinct multivariate performance profile clusters based on CP and IP ratings, and to determine if cluster membership is significantly associated with Playing Level, Gender, or Position.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the performance profiling process in enhancing player self-awareness and intention to act, quantitative data from the Athlete's Performance Profile Questionnaire (APPQ) and qualitative insights from player interviews were used.
4. To qualitatively explore how players interpret their performance profiles and explain the meaning and consequences of their CP-IP Gaps for their athletic development and on-field performance.
5. To generate evidence-based, context-specific recommendations to help reduce priority CP-IP Gaps and optimize the implementation of performance profiling within Fiji Rugby Sevens programs.

1.3.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and corresponding hypotheses were formulated to address the study's objectives.

1.3.1.1 Research Question 1:

How do Current Performance (CP), Ideal Performance (IP), Mean Gap, and domain-specific Gap scores differ across Playing Levels (Elite, Development, University), Genders, Position groups, and Age groups?

H1a: Effect of Playing Level

- Null (H_o-1a): There is no significant difference in the mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores among Elite, Development, and University players.
- Alternative (H_a-1a): The mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores for at least one Playing Level differ significantly from the others.

H1b: Effect of Gender

- Null (H_o-1b): There is no significant difference between male and female players' mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores.
- Alternative (H_a-1b): The mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores differ significantly between male and female players.

H1c: Effect of Playing Position

- Null (H_o-1c): There is no significant difference between position groups' mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores.
- Alternative (H_a-1c): The mean distributions of CP, IP, or Gap scores differ significantly between position groups.

H1d: Effect of Age

- Null (H_o-1d): There is no significant association (correlation) between player Age and their CP, IP, or Gap scores.
- Alternative (H_a-1d): A significant association (correlation) exists between player Age and their CP, IP, or Gap scores.

1.3.1.2 Research Question 2:

Are there distinct multivariate CP/IP profile clusters that distinguish players by Level, Gender, Position, or Age?

H2a: Association with Playing Level

- Null (H_o-2a): Membership in identified player profile clusters is not significantly associated with Playing Level.
- Alternative (H_a-2a): Membership in identified player profile clusters is significantly associated with Playing Level.

H2b: Association with Playing Position

- Null (H_o-2b): Membership in identified player profile clusters is not significantly associated with Playing Position.
- Alternative (H_a-2b): Membership in identified player profile clusters is significantly associated with Playing Position.

1.3.1.3 Research Question 3:

How effective was the performance profiling process in enhancing player self-awareness and intention to act, as measured by the APPQ and described in player interviews?

H3: Association with Performance Profiling Process

Participants will positively appraise the performance profiling process.

- Null (H_o-3): APPQ scores do not indicate a positive appraisal of the performance profiling process.
- Alternative (H_a-3): APPQ scores indicate a positive appraisal, showing improvement in self-awareness and intention to act following the process.

1.3.1.4 Research Question 4 (Qualitative):

How do players interpret their performance profiles, and what meaning do they ascribe to the CP-IP Gaps in the context of their development and on-field performance?

1.4 Significance and Original Contribution

This research is poised to make significant and original contributions to theory, methodology, and practice within sport psychology, specifically within the high-performance context of Fiji Rugby 7s. Its significance can be understood across three key domains:

1.4.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study will extend the application of Personal Construct Theory and Cognitive Evaluation Theory by applying Performance Profiling within a unique, high-achieving, yet under-researched cultural context. It will provide a critical case study on how these Western-derived psychological frameworks function within a Pacific indigenous sporting culture. It will offer new insights into the cross-cultural validity and utility of athlete-centered approaches.

1.4.2 Methodological Contribution

The study pioneers a sophisticated mixed-methods approach in this specific context. Combining quantitative profiling and hypothesis testing with in-depth qualitative exploration moves beyond simple descriptions of performance attributes. The identification of multivariate player profiles (addressing Research Question 2) represents a novel analytical approach in this field, offering a more nuanced way to understand player archetypes than traditional single-variable analysis. Furthermore, it will be the first study to formally validate the utility of the Performance Profiling tool (via the APPQ and interviews) within an elite Fijian sporting environment.

1.4.3 Practical Contribution

The practical implications for Fiji Rugby are direct and substantial, providing tangible benefits at every level of the sport:

1.4.3.1 For Coaches and Practitioners:

The findings will provide the first-ever empirical benchmark of player-perceived performance gaps across the talent pathway. This data-driven insight will enable the design of targeted, evidence-based training interventions that address the specific needs of athletes based on their level, gender, age, and position (addressing Research Question 1).

1.4.3.2 For Athletes:

The study champions an athlete-centered model that empowers players by enhancing their self-awareness and giving them ownership of their development. This process can foster intrinsic motivation and a more collaborative coach-athlete relationship.

1.4.3.3 For Policy and Strategy:

By providing a clear, holistic picture of the developmental landscape, this research will equip the Fiji Rugby Union with strategic intelligence to refine its talent identification, player development, and high-performance programs, helping to sustain its long-term competitive advantage.

In essence, this study bridges the gap between anecdotal understanding and empirical evidence, providing a foundational piece of academically rigorous and practical research for the future of Fiji Rugby 7s.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

The researcher acknowledges the following potential limitations that may influence the interpretation of the findings:

1. ***Reliance on Self-Report Data***: The core data (Current and Ideal Performance ratings) are based on the athlete's self-perception. While inherent to the performance profiling method, this approach is subject to potential biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. This limitation is mitigated by the study's mixed-methods design, which incorporates qualitative interviews to provide a deeper context for the ratings and triangulate the findings.
2. ***Sample Representativeness***: While a sample size of 100 is robust for the planned analysis, it may not fully represent Fiji rugby players' entire population. The recruitment was focused on accessible teams and players within the defined tiers, which could introduce a selection bias.
3. ***Researcher Influence***: In the qualitative interviews, the researcher's presence could influence participant responses. This was minimized by building rapport and ensuring confidentiality, as outlined in the methodology chapter.
4. ***Cultural Context***: The "culture of silence" within the Fijian context may pose challenges, as researchers may encounter difficulties eliciting open and detailed responses. This was addressed by being mindful of the cultural context when interpreting data and considering the potential influence of cultural norms on responses.

1.6 Delimitations of the Research

The boundaries of this research were purposefully set to ensure a focused and in-depth investigation:

1. ***Geographical and Sporting Context***: This study specifically focuses on the sport of Rugby Sevens within Fiji's unique cultural and performance ecosystem. Consequently, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other sports or national contexts.
2. ***Population***: The research is delimited to active players within three specific tiers of the Fijian rugby pathway: Elite (national team members), Club (top-tier domestic

competition), and University (tertiary-level competition). Youth, amateur, or international players outside this system are not included.

3. ***Research Instrument***: The study exclusively employs the Butler & Hardy (1992) performance profiling technique as the primary tool for eliciting athlete-perceived constructs. The Athlete's Performance Profile Questionnaire (APPQ) is used to measure the process's utility. Other psychological assessment tools were not considered.
4. ***Research Design***: The study utilizes a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. It provides a detailed snapshot of player perceptions, but does not track player development or changes in performance gaps longitudinally

1.7 Terms and Definitions

Performance profiling (PP)

Performance profiling is the central methodological tool and psychological intervention used to systematically identify and quantify the perceived gap between an athlete's Current Performance (CP) and their conception of Ideal Performance (IP). It is an athlete-centered process where players self-assess their abilities across a range of predetermined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) spanning four key domains: Physical, Technical, Tactical, and Psychological. The process generates both quantitative data (the numerical ratings) and qualitative insights (the player's rationale and reflections), making it the cornerstone of the study's mixed-methods design.

Current Performance (CP)

Current Performance represents an athlete's subjective self-assessment of their present abilities and competencies at a specific moment in time. It is a quantitative self-rating where each player evaluates their own proficiency against a comprehensive list of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Essentially, CP is the athlete's answer to the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, where is my skill level right now for this specific ability?" It is a snapshot of the player's perceived reality and serves as the foundational baseline in the performance profiling process.

Ideal Performance (IP)

Ideal Performance is the athlete's subjective, self-defined benchmark representing the level of proficiency they believe is necessary to be a top-tier or "ideal" performer in their specific playing position. It is a cognitive construct that serves as an aspirational standard. When engaging in the performance profiling process, an athlete assigns an IP rating to each Key

Performance Indicator (KPI), effectively answering the question: "On a scale of 1 to 10, what level must an ideal player in my position possess for this specific skill to succeed at the highest level?" This concept is distinct from a momentary "peak performance" state; rather, IP represents the consistent, high-level standard of execution that an athlete aspires to achieve.

Performance Gap

Performance Gap is the calculated, quantitative difference between an athlete's self-assessed Ideal Performance (IP) and their Current Performance (CP) for a given Key Performance Indicator (KPI). It is the central output of the performance profiling process and is derived from the simple formula: Performance Gap = IP - CP. This value is not a direct rating but a crucial diagnostic metric that represents the athlete's perceived area of developmental need. A larger gap indicates a greater discrepancy between where an athlete believes they currently are and the standard they believe is required to excel, thereby highlighting a priority area for improvement.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicators are the specific, granular, and athlete-centered performance attributes or skills and characteristics used to operationalize and measure the four core domains of performance: Technical, Tactical, Physical, and Psychological.

Tactical skills

Tactical skills refer to the cognitive, decision-making aspects of performance that govern when, where, and why a player performs an action. This domain is distinct from the physical or technical execution of a skill; instead, it represents the player's "Game Intelligence" or "Rugby IQ." It involves reading the game, anticipating opposition movements, identifying opportunities, and making effective decisions under pressure that align with the team's overall strategy. It is the application of knowledge and awareness within the dynamic and fluid context of a match.

Technical skills

Technical skills refer to the specific, discrete, and often biomechanical actions that a player executes to perform a game-related task. They represent the "how-to" of rugby—the fundamental mechanics of interacting with the ball, opponents, and teammates. This domain focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of a player's execution of core rugby actions, distinct from the tactical decisions of when or why to perform them.

Physical skills

Physical skills represent a broad, holistic domain that encompasses not only traditional on-field athletic capabilities (e.g. speed/acceleration, strength and power, agility, and speed endurance) but also the off-field behaviours and lifestyle factors (e.g. nutrition, hydration, recovery practices, and quality sleep) that create a foundation for performance.

Psychological skills

Psychological skills often referred to as mental skills, are the tools and strategies that athletes and other high-performers systematically learn and practice to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve peak performance. These skills are not innate traits but are learnable and can be developed over time through a structured training program, much like physical or technical skills. The primary goal of psychological skills training (PST) is to help performers become more consistent, resilient, and effective, especially under pressure.

Playing Position

Playing Position is defined as the specialized tactical role and corresponding set of functional responsibilities that a player performs within the team's on-field structure. It serves as a primary independent variable and a central analytical lens through which player performance profiles are understood.

Peak performance

Peak performance is a state of peak experience, zone of optimal functioning, and flow. The "ultimate high that can be reached in human performance" (Privette, 1983). The characteristics of peak performance included feeling in complete control when athletes experienced effortless/automatic performances, a narrow focus of attention, being relaxed, feeling confident, and not fearing failure during their most exceptional moment in sport (Wells, 1998).

Self-awareness

Self-awareness refers to an athlete's conscious knowledge and accurate understanding of their own internal states, including their strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, and emotions, particularly as they relate to their athletic performance. The performance profiling process is hypothesized to enhance this capacity.

Playing Level

Playing Level refers to the specific competitive tier within the Fiji Rugby 7s talent pathway to which a player belongs. For this study, the levels are operationally defined as:

(i) Elite

Players who are current members of the national men's or women's Fiji Rugby 7s squads.

(ii) Club (or Development)

Players competing in the highest level of domestic competition who are considered on the cusp of national selection.

(iii) University

Players representing tertiary institutions, often forming the foundational stage of the high-performance pathway.

Talent Pathway

Talent Pathway refers to the structured system through which players are identified and developed refers to the progression from University and Club levels to the Elite national team.

Elitism

Elitism is not a social or pejorative term but rather a specific, operational classification that denotes the highest stratum of athletic achievement and competitive standing within the Fiji Rugby Sevens pathway. It is the category used to classify the cohort of players who perform at the national or top professional level.

Goal-setting

Goal-setting is the systematic process of identifying specific objectives and creating a structured plan to achieve them within a particular timeframe. The process is a cornerstone of athlete development, providing direction, enhancing motivation, and offering a clear benchmark for evaluating progress.

Motivation

Motivation is defined as the internal and external forces that direct, energize, and sustain an athlete's effort and behavior over time. It is the fundamental "why" behind an athlete's decision to train, persist through adversity, and strive for excellence.

Biopsychosocial

Biopsychosocial model is a holistic framework that views athlete performance as a dynamic product of interconnected biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. For Fiji Rugby 7s players, this includes not only physical conditioning and conventional mental skills but also culturally-relevant and responsive psychological pillars like spirituality (lotu) and the significant impact of off-field social and cultural obligations, which can lead to conflicts affecting performance.

Culturally-relevant and responsive approach

This is the practical application of the biopsychosocial model. It requires adapting performance profiling and support strategies to the unique Fijian context, moving beyond generic Western templates. This is achieved by recognizing cultural factors as strengths,

understanding systemic challenges like the "sociocultural-physiological conflict," and tailoring interventions to be authentic, respectful, and sustainable within the culture, thereby ensuring their effectiveness.

1.8 Synopsis Structure

This synopsis outlines the structure of the thesis, which is organized into six chapters, each building logically upon the last to present a comprehensive investigation into the performance profiles of Fiji Rugby 7s players.

- ***Chapter 1: Introduction***

This first chapter has established the background and context of Fiji Rugby 7s, defined the research problem, stated the purpose, aims, and research questions, and outlined the study's theoretical, methodological, and practical significance.

- ***Chapter 2: Literature Review***

This chapter provides a critical review of the relevant academic literature, establishing the conceptual framework for the study.

- ***Chapter 3: Research Methodology***

This chapter details the mixed-methods research design employed to answer the study's research questions.

- ***Chapter 4: Results and Discussion***
    - ***Results***

This chapter presents the data analysis findings in a structured and objective manner, organized according to the research questions.

    - ***Discussion***

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 Results section, discussing their theoretical and practical implications. The discussion will connect the study's findings to the existing literature, highlighting both consistencies and novel insights.

- ***Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations***

The final chapter provides a summary of the entire study, restating the key findings in relation to the initial research aims.

2 CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides a critical foundation for understanding the application of performance profiling in elite sports, establishing a specific focus on the unique context of Fiji Rugby 7s. Performance profiling is a holistic, athlete-centered assessment designed to enhance player development by treating performance as an interconnected system of on-field skills and off-field realities. While its utility has been explored across various sports, a significant gap persists in the literature: there is a notable lack of research examining performance profiling within elite Rugby 7s.

The literature is reviewed based on the following areas:

- Impact of Sport Psychology on Sports Performance
- Psychological Skills & Characteristics
- Rugby 7s: A Unique Sporting Context
- Performance Analysis
- Key Performance Indicators in Sports
- Gender Differences in Performance Analysis
- Position-Specific Performance Analysis
- Performance Profiling in Sports
- The Biopsychosocial Context of Performance
- Conceptual Framework

2.2 Performance Profiling as a Diagnostic Tool

1. The Performance Profile: Theory and Application (Butler, R. J., & Hardy, L., 1992)

Performance profiling is a method used in sports to assess and reflect on preparation for competition and identify areas of improvement. It involves eliciting performers' perception of important qualities for elite performance and rating themselves on those qualities. This information can guide training and communication between performers and coaches. The paper discusses using Personal Construct Theory and performance profiling to enhance athletic performance through self-awareness and targeted training. The personal construct theory and the repertory grid method are used to understand an individual's unique perceptions and interpretations. Performance profiling is used in sports psychology to assess athletes' feelings about their preparation for competition. It can help improve self-awareness and guide training.

Performance profiling is also used in coaching to help athletes understand their strengths and weaknesses and set goals for improvement.

2. The Performance Profile in Practice (Butler, R., Smith, M., & Irwin, I., 1993)

Butler et al. (1993) demonstrate the practical application of the Performance Profiling (PP) technique in sports psychology, using amateur boxing as a case study. The study highlights how this athlete-driven tool empowers performers to identify key qualities for elite success, rate their own abilities against these criteria, and visually map their progress.
By comparing athletes' self-assessments with coach evaluations, the technique effectively identifies discrepancies in perception, enhances self-awareness, and facilitates targeted goal-setting. The research found that using these profiles to tailor individual training interventions led to measurable improvements in boxers' confidence and technical skills. Ultimately, the paper establishes the Performance Profile as a valuable tool for coaches and psychologists to monitor progress, improve coach-athlete communication, and foster an athlete's ownership of their development.

3. Performance Profiling (Weston, 2008)

This chapter focuses on performance profiling, assessing and enhancing athletes' psychological skills and attributes. Performance profiling is based on personal construct theory, which assumes individuals have unique ways of perceiving and interpreting their experiences.

Performance profiling involves three main steps: introducing the idea, eliciting constructs, and assessment. Athletes are asked to identify the psychological factors that are important for their performance, rate their current levels of competence, and set goals for improvement.

Performance profiling can have various benefits, such as increasing self-awareness, motivation, confidence, and focus; providing a basis for goal-setting, training, evaluation, and monitoring; enhancing communication and feedback; and facilitating change and development. Performance profiling can be applied to different aspects of sport psychology, such as leadership, team cohesion, anxiety, imagery, and music. It can also be adapted to various sports, levels of competition, and individual preferences.

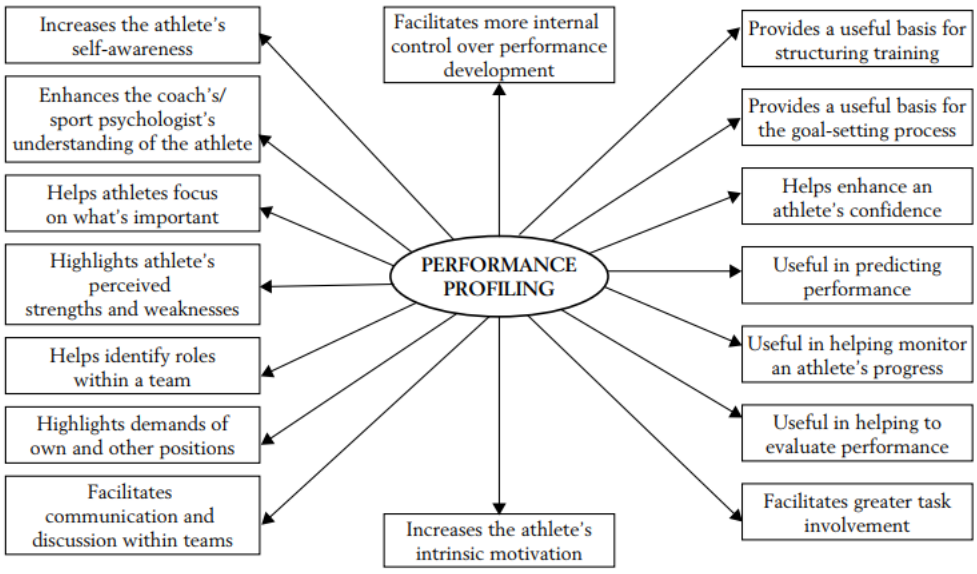
Increases the athlete's self-awareness
Enhances the coach's/ sport psychologist's understanding of the athlete
Helps athletes focus on what's important
Highlights athlete's perceived strengths and weaknesses
Helps identify roles within a team
Highlights demands of own and other positions
Facilitates communication and discussion within teams
Facilitates more internal control over performance development
PERFORMANCE PROFILING
Increases the athlete's intrinsic motivation
Provides a useful basis for structuring training
Provides a useful basis for the goal-setting process
Helps enhance an athlete's confidence
Useful in predicting performance
Useful in helping monitor an athlete's progress
Useful in helping to evaluate performance
Facilitates greater task involvement

Figure 2.1 *A summary of the Proposed Impacts and Uses of Performance Profiling (Adopted from Weston, 2008)*

2.3 Defining Performance in Elite Rugby 7s

4. The use of performance indicators in performance analysis (Hughes & Bartlett, 2002)

Hughes & Bartlett (2002) provide a critical narrative review of the performance profiling technique, a client-centered assessment tool developed by Butler and Hardy (1992). The paper evaluates the technique's theoretical underpinnings, practical application, validity, and overall benefits and limitations. It argues that performance profiling is a valuable tool for athletes, coaches, and sports psychologists, as it effectively enhances an athlete's self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, and confidence. By facilitating communication and empowering the athlete, the technique aids in collaborative goal-setting and performance improvement across various sports. However, the authors also acknowledge significant caveats, highlighting the potential for subjectivity and bias and stressing the need for more rigorous empirical validation to solidify its scientific standing.

5. Performance Indicators Related to Points Scoring and Winning in International Rugby Sevens (Higham, D. G., Hopkins, W. G., Pyne, D. B., & Anson, J. M, 2014)

In their 2014 study, Higham et al. conducted a large-scale quantitative analysis of 196 international men's rugby sevens matches to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) that correlate with scoring points and winning. The research successfully isolated 13 team KPIs

and, using mixed-model and linear modeling, quantified their specific impact on a team's score and probability of victory. This paper makes a significant contribution by providing empirical evidence to inform performance profiling, directly identifying the most critical technical and tactical factors for success in rugby sevens. By demonstrating a data-driven method to link specific actions to match outcomes, the study offers a robust foundation for coaches and athletes to prioritize training objectives and performance assessments.

2.4 The Socio-Cultural Context of Fijian Athlete Development

6. Managing the health of the elite athlete: a new integrated performance health management and coaching model (Dijkstra, H. P., Pollock, N., Chakraverty, R., & Alonso, J., 2014)

This article proposes an integrated model for managing elite athlete health that combines medical care with performance coaching. The authors argue that a siloed approach, where medical teams and coaching staff operate independently, is insufficient for modern high-performance environments. They advocate for a holistic system where all aspects of the athlete's well-being, including physical health, injury prevention, nutrition, and psychological support, are managed cohesively. This paper is crucial for your thesis, providing a structural framework for your practical recommendations. It supports your finding that on-field performance is inextricably linked to off-field factors and that effective interventions must be holistic and address the athlete as a whole person.

7. Psychology and socioculture affect injury risk, response, and recovery in high-intensity athletes: a consensus statement (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010)

This paper emphasizes the importance of considering sociocultural factors in the psychological response to and recovery from athletic injury. Wiese-Bjornstal argues that an athlete's cultural background, social support systems, and personal identity influence their experience. While focused on injury, its central thesis directly applies to your findings regarding the "sociocultural-physiological conflict." It provides strong academic backing for your conclusion that performance support systems in Fiji must be culturally sensitive. It validates the need for interventions that recognize and respect each athlete's cultural background and their unique pressures, which is a critical aspect of effective coaching and management.

2.5 Theoretical Foundation

2.6 The Contextual and Cultural Gap

The current literature fundamentally lacks a framework that integrates the unique biopsychosocial realities of Pasifika athletes. Generic profiling tools fail to account for the "sociocultural-physiological conflict" which is a central theme in Fijian high performance where community obligations, cultural identity, and lifestyle factors are inextricably linked to on-field readiness and psychological well-being.

Future research must therefore move beyond simply translating existing instruments and instead focus on developing culturally-relevant and responsive profiling methodologies that recognize the athlete as a whole person, validating their lived experience as a core component of their performance profile.

In summary, this conceptual framework (visualized in Figure 2.1) uses Performance Profiling as its core data-gathering method, justified by PCT and CET, to analyze performance across four interconnected domains. The entire process is interpreted through Dynamic Systems Theory and embedded within the rich biopsychosocial context of Fiji Rugby 7s.

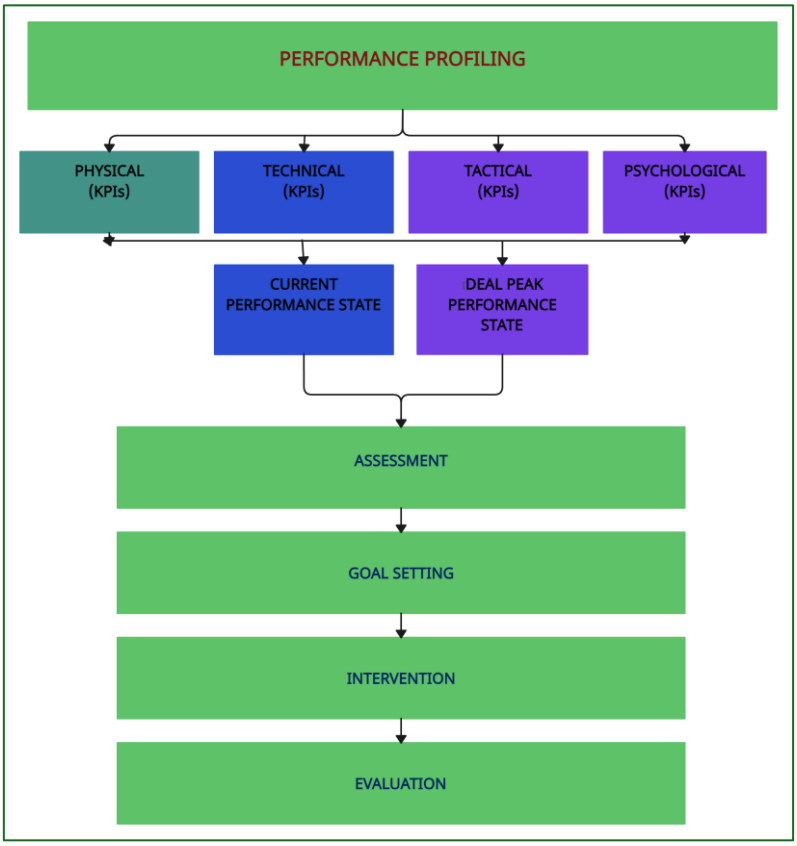

Figure 2.2. *Performance Profiling Four-Stage Cycle*

3 CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research is founded on a pragmatist paradigm, which prioritizes the practical application of research to answer the study's questions. This paradigm justifies using a mixed-methods approach to create a comprehensive understanding by integrating quantitative data (performance metrics) with qualitative data (players' lived experiences and perceptions). This approach is particularly well-suited to the study's theoretical framework of Dynamic Systems Theory, as it allows for measuring performance components while exploring the complex, contextual interactions between them.

3.2 Research Design

To operationalize this, the study employs a mixed-methods Convergent Parallel Design. This design involves collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, analyzing each dataset separately, and then merging the findings during the final interpretation. The strength of this design lies in its ability to triangulate results, thereby enhancing the study's credibility. The quantitative strand provides structured, objective measurements of performance gaps, while the qualitative strand offers deep, contextual insights into the players' perspectives. By integrating these two streams, the research moves beyond a simple description of "what" the performance gaps are to explain "why" they exist, creating a richer and more nuanced understanding of player performance within the Fiji Rugby 7s system.

3.3 Participants and Sampling Strategy

This study utilized a two-part sampling strategy aligned with its mixed-methods design:

- **Quantitative Strand**

For the main quantitative phase, a census sampling approach was used within an accessible cohort of Fiji Rugby 7s players to reach a target sample of 100 participants. Data was collected through a systematic, multi-step process:

1. Participants provided informed consent and demographic details.
2. They then engaged in the Performance Profiling (PP) protocol, where they individually generated and rated their own performance constructs for both Current Performance (CP) and Ideal Performance (IP). This process included a group deliberation session with players in similar positions to help define the "ideal performer."

3. Finally, participants completed the Athlete Performance Profile Questionnaire (APPQ) to measure the perceived usefulness of the profiling exercise.

- **Qualitative Strand**

For the qualitative phase, a purposive maximum-variation sampling strategy was employed. From the initial group of 100, a subsample of 30 participants was deliberately selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The goal was to capture the widest possible range of perspectives and experiences. Selection was carefully managed to ensure diversity across:

- Playing Level (Elite, Club, University)
- Gender
- Playing Position
- Age
- Performance Gap Profiles (e.g., large, small, or atypical gaps)

This approach allowed the qualitative data to provide rich, contextual explanations for the patterns observed in the quantitative results.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection was a systematic, multi-stage process involving quantitative and qualitative methods.

- **Quantitative Data Collection Procedure**

The primary data collection for all 100 participants followed a structured, three-step protocol to ensure consistency.

1. Preliminary Administration:

i. Briefing and Consent: All participants were thoroughly briefed about the study's purpose and procedures before data were collected.

ii. Informed Consent: Participants provided written informed consent to agree to participate officially.

iii. Demographic Information: Each participant completed a form to provide their demographic details, including gender, age, primary playing position, and current competitive level (Elite, Club, or University).

2. Performance Profiling (PP) Protocol

This was the core data collection activity, conducted in four distinct parts:

i. **Orientation**: The session began with a standardized introduction to the Performance Profiling process. The rationale and potential benefits were explained to the athletes, using examples to ensure they understood the task.

ii. **Current Performance (CP) Elicitation**: Working individually, each athlete generated a personal list of 16-20 qualities, skills, or characteristics they believed were essential for their performance. They then rated their own current proficiency for each item on a scale of 1 to 10.

iii. **Position-Specific Group Deliberation**: Athletes were then organized into small groups based on their playing position (e.g., all forwards together, all backs together). In these groups, they discussed and collaboratively defined the key characteristics of an ideal performer in their specific role.

iv. **Ideal Performance (IP) Elicitation**: The athletes returned to working individually after the group discussion. They generated a list of 16-20 qualities for an ideal performer and rated the importance of each of these qualities on a 1-to-10 scale.

3. Concluding Assessment

Immediately after completing the PP protocol, every participant was given the Athlete Performance Profile Questionnaire (APPQ). This questionnaire quantitatively measured their perceptions of the profiling exercise, including its usefulness, impact, and intention to use it.

- **Qualitative Data Collection Procedure**

A subsample of 30 participants from the larger group was selected for follow-up interviews.

1. Method

- **Individual Semi-Structured Interviews**: The qualitative data was collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen over focus groups to provide more depth, ensure privacy, and allow participants to comfortably share sensitive or personal experiences. The goal was to understand the meaning, context, and mechanisms linking their self-rated performance gaps to their perceptions of success.

2. Participant Selection

- **Purposive Sampling**: A purposive, maximum-variation sampling strategy was used to select the 30 interviewees from the original cohort 100.
- **Selection Criteria**: The selection was deliberately managed to ensure the subsample was diverse and representative. Quotas were set to include a wide range of participants based on:

i. Playing Level: Elite, Club, and University

ii. Gender: Male and Female

iii. Position: A mix of specialist roles (props, hookers, halfbacks, etc.)
iv. Age: Covering various age bands
v. Performance Profiles: Including players with large, small, and atypical performance gaps.

Practical considerations like availability and consent were applied last, with a system for replacing any unavailable participant with a similar match to maintain the sample's diversity.

3.5 Data Analysis

- **Quantitative**

The quantitative analysis was comprehensive, focusing on calculating Key Performance Indicator (KPI) scores for current and ideal performance and the discrepancy scores between them. The data was analyzed using:

- **Descriptive Statistics**: To summarize the scores (means, standard deviations, etc.) for different groups (gender, level, position, age).
- **Within-Subject Comparisons**: Paired t-tests were used to determine the statistical significance of the gaps between a player's current and ideal performance ratings, with effect sizes (Cohen's d) calculated to measure the magnitude of these gaps.
- **Association Analysis**: Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships among different KPI scores.

- **Qualitative**

For the qualitative data, Deductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke. The primary goal was to identify themes that explained the interactions between different performance domains (tactical, physical, etc.) and the influence of systemic constraints like coaching or culture. The analysis was systematically managed using NVivo 14 software to organize transcripts, develop coding structures, and document reflexive insights throughout the interpretive process.

- **Integration**

The quantitative and qualitative data integration occurred during the final interpretation stage. This was achieved through a side-by-side comparison, where qualitative themes were used to explain and provide context for the quantitative findings. For instance, a statistically significant performance gap in a specific KPI (the "what") could be explained by interview themes

describing why that gap exists (the "why"). This convergent approach strengthened the study's conclusions, and any points of divergence were used to refine interpretations and practical recommendations.

3.6 Ethical Considerations, Rigour, and Reflexivity

The study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical principles to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants. Key measures included:

- ***Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation***: Participants received detailed information about the study and were required to provide written informed consent. It was made clear that their involvement was entirely voluntary and separate from team activities.
- ***Right to Withdraw***: All athletes were explicitly informed of their right to leave the study at any point without penalty or explanation.
- ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***: All data was anonymized with a coding system to protect privacy. Digital files were stored on encrypted, password-protected drives, while physical consent forms were kept separately in a locked cabinet.
- ***Mitigating Power Dynamics***: Coaching staff were not involved in recruiting participants and were not present during data collection to prevent coercion. This ensured that athletes felt free to participate and respond honestly without pressure.
- ***Minimizing Burden and Risk***: Data collection was scheduled to avoid conflicts with training, competitions, or other stressful periods. Additionally, a specific protocol was implemented for the group deliberation phase, where participants verbally agreed to keep the discussions confidential to protect one another.

4 Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the study's aim: to present the integrated results of a mixed-methods performance profiling study involving 100 Fiji Rugby 7s players from Elite, Club, and University levels. The primary research goal is to explore the relationship between the players' Current Performance (CP), their Ideal Performance (IP), and the perceived gaps between these two states.

The chapter sets the stage for its findings by revealing that while a significant CP-IP gap exists across all levels, the nature of this gap varies: Elite players have position-specific tactical needs, Club players require broad technical improvement, and University players focus on foundational technical skills. Furthermore, it introduces the role of qualitative data, which provides a rich context for these quantitative gaps. This data reveals that on-field performance is a complex negotiation between players' cognitive-tactical strengths and significant off-field challenges rooted in lifestyle, culture, and psychology.

4.1.1 Quantitative Participant Demographics

The study sample comprised N = 100 participants (see Table 4.1). Participants were aged predominantly between 23 and 28 years (n = 45; 45.0%), with smaller groups aged 29–34 (n = 24; 24.0%), 17–22 (n = 23; 23.0%), and 35+ (n = 8; 8.0%). The sample included 60 males (60.0%) and 40 females (40.0%). Playing-level distribution was 38 elite (38.0%), 32 club (32.0%), and 30 university (30.0%). Playing positions were distributed across forwards and backs, with the largest single groups being Prop (n = 22; 22.0%), Hooker (n = 16; 16.0%).

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N=100)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age Group	17–22	23	23
	23–28	45	45
	29–34	24	24
	35+	8	8
Gender	Female	40	40

	Male	60	60
Playing Level	Elite	38	38
	Club	32	32
	University	30	30
Playing Position	Prop	22	22
	Hooker	16	16
	Center	14	14
	Utility Back	14	14
	Flyhalf	12	12
	Winger	12	12
	Halfback	10	10

Note. n represents the total number of participants. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

4.1.2 Qualitative Participant Demographics

Thirty participants were purposively sampled for semi-structured interviews using a stratified Level × Gender design. Interview counts by stratum are presented in Table 4.2. The qualitative sample comprises 17 men (56.7%) and 13 women (43.3%). By playing level, Elite participants account for 12 interviews (40.0%), Club for 9 (30.0%), and University for 9 (30.0%).

Table 4.2

Interview Participant Demographics

Stratum (Level × Gender)	Interviews (n)	Percentage of qualitative sample (%)
Elite – Men	7	23.3
Elite – Women	5	16.7
Club – Men	5	16.7
Club – Women	4	13.3
University – Men	5	16.7
University – Women	4	13.3
Total	30	100.0

4.2 Quantitative: The CP-IP Gap

- **The Influence of Playing Level (H1a)**

Based on the statistical evidence, **the null hypothesis (H0-1a) failed to be rejected (Null Hypothesis accepted).**

The analysis (see Table 4.3) demonstrates no statistically significant differences in the mean scores for any measured Current Performance (CP) or Ideal Performance (IP) competencies based on playing level. The negligible discrepancies observed in the mean scores between Elite, Club, and University players are attributable to random sampling variability rather than a true effect of playing level. This finding suggests that, within this cohort of athletes, self-perception of these specific physical, psychological, technical, and tactical skills does not vary significantly with their competitive standing.

Table 4.3

One-Way ANOVA of Key Performance Competencies by Playing Level

KPI Domain	Skills & Characteristics Metric	df	F-statistic	p-value (Sig.)
Physical	Agility	(2, 231)	1.083	0.34
	Endurance	(2, 320)	0.329	0.72
Psychological	Attitude	(2, 184)	0.849	0.429
	Concentration	(2, 255)	0.592	0.554
	Confidence	(2, 319)	0.726	0.484
	Discipline	(2, 333)	0.464	0.629
	Focus	(2, 261)	2.263	0.106
Technical	Catching	(2, 204)	0.062	0.94
Tactical	Codework	(2, 149)	1.137	0.323
	Decision Making	(2, 395)	0.371	0.691
	Game Awareness	(2, 197)	0.677	0.509
	Game Flow	(2, 101)	1.2	0.305
	Game Plan	(2, 209)	0.372	0.69
	Game Rules	(2, 101)	1.091	0.34
	Game Strategy	(2, 93)	0.219	0.803
	Player Combination	(2, 135)	0.985	0.376

Note. ANOVA and Post Hoc test output.

- **The Influence of Gender (H1b)**

The analysis demonstrates significant differences in how male and female athletes perceive their competencies (see Table 4.4). These differences are not uniform across all skills; instead, they form a distinct pattern where females rate their tactical awareness and psychological resilience higher, while males rate their attitude and specific technical skills higher. These findings underscore the importance of considering gender in performance assessments and suggest that coaching and development strategies may need to be tailored to address the unique perceptual profiles of male and female athletes.

Based on the results of the independent samples t-tests, **reject the null hypothesis (H0-1b) and find strong support for the alternative hypothesis (HA-1b).**

Table 4.4

Independent Samples T-Test of Performance Competencies by Gender

Competency Domain	Competency Metric	Gender	N	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Physical	CP Physical Agility	Male	100	6.54	2.052	-0.3
		Female	134	7.13	1.878	
	CP Physical Speed Endurance	Male	50	5.8	2.579	-0.906
		Female	87	7.53	1.388	
Psychological	CP Psychological Attitude	Male	84	8.06	0.974	0.547
		Female	103	7.2	1.917	
	CP Psychological Confidence	Male	190	7.98	1.409	0.288
		Female	132	7.58	1.371	
	CP Psychological Guts	Male	60	7.1	1.362	-1.532
		Female	43	8.93	0.91	
	CP Psychological Teamwork	Male	94	7.34	1.16	-0.956
		Female	67	8.39	0.999	
Technical	CP Technical Catching	Male	83	8.43	0.9	0.605
		Female	124	7.56	1.722	
	CP Technical Offload	Male	133	6.33	1.556	-0.539
		Female	120	7.27	1.917	

Tactical	CP Tactical Game Awareness	Male	127	6.89	1.644	-0.488
		Female	73	7.67	1.528	
	CP Tactical Game Strategy	Male	36	5.94	1.194	-2.338
		Female	60	8.2	0.798	
	CP Tactical Read the Game	Male	34	5.94	1.613	-1.635
		Female	48	8.21	1.202	
	CP Tactical Support Play	Male	93	6.75	1.692	-0.689
		Female	72	7.83	1.394	

Note. Effect size (Cohen's d Point Estimate) is provided to show the magnitude of the difference. A negative sign indicates the mean for females was higher than the mean for males. By convention, effect sizes of |0.2| are small, |0.5| are medium, and |0.8| are large.

- **The Influence of Playing Position (H1c)**

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the **rejection of the null hypothesis (H0-1c)**. The alternative hypothesis (HA-1c) is accepted, as the analysis consistently demonstrates that the mean distributions of both Current Performance (CP) and Ideal Performance (IP) scores differ significantly across playing positions (see Table 4.5). The magnitude and breadth of these differences confirm that positional roles are fundamentally linked to distinct competency profiles in rugby.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA for Key Competencies by Playing Position

Competency Metric	**Prop (M ± SD)**	**Hooker (M ± SD)**	**Halfback (M ± SD)**	**Flyhalf (M ± SD)**	**Center (M ± SD)**	**Winger (M ± SD)**	**F-statistic**	**p-value (Sig.)**
CP Physical Agility	5.00 ± 2.05	6.42 ± 1.83	8.85 ± 0.79	8.71 ± 1.13	8.85 ± 0.99	8.89 ± 1.15	13.559	<.001
CP Psychological Attitude	5.83 ± 1.95	7.92 ± 1.08	8.33 ± 1.29	8.33 ± 1.29	8.11 ± 1.10	7.71 ± 1.68	14.957	<.001

CP Technical Passing both Sides	4.14 ± 2.29	7.82 ± 1.34	8.89 ± 0.81	8.89 ± 0.81	8.52 ± 1.19	7.50 ± 1.87	25.14	<.001
CP Tactical Game Awareness	4.60 ± 1.96	7.23 ± 1.23	8.44 ± 1.14	8.25 ± 1.39	8.33 ± 1.07	7.20 ± 1.93	20.061	<.001

Note. M = Mean score; SD = Standard Deviation

- **The Influence of Age (H1d)**

The ANOVA results in Table 4.6 repeatedly show statistically significant p-values ($p < .001$) across dozens of CP and IP competencies, indicating that the mean performance scores are not the same across the different age groups. This directly refutes the null hypothesis of no association. The evidence confirms that age is significantly associated with athletes' self-perceived performance, with post-hoc tests revealing distinct development patterns, peak performance, and decline across physical, psychological, and tactical domains.

Based on the comprehensive and robust findings from the ANOVA, **reject the null hypothesis (H0-1d) and find strong support for the alternative hypothesis (HA-1d).**

Table 4.6

ANOVA of Key Performance Competencies by Age Group

Competency Domain	**Competency Metric**	**17–22 (M ± SD)**	**23–28 (M ± SD)**	**29–34 (M ± SD)**	**35+ (M ± SD)**	**F-statistic**	**p-value (Sig.)**
Physical	CP Physical Endurance	7.65 ± 1.39	7.79 ± 0.80	6.70 ± 1.56	3.71 ± 0.91	80.893	<.001
	CP Physical Strength	7.62 ± 1.37	8.27 ± 1.13	7.44 ± 1.48	4.36 ± 1.48	102.131	<.001
Psychological	CP Psychological Discipline	8.00 ± 1.40	8.16 ± 1.14	8.21 ± 1.09	6.71 ± 2.25	10.158	<.001
	CP Psychological Trust	8.05 ± 1.43	8.67 ± 1.07	6.93 ± 1.36	6.44 ± 1.56	21.368	<.001

| | | |

Figure 4.1. *Current Performance by Age Groups (Elite)*

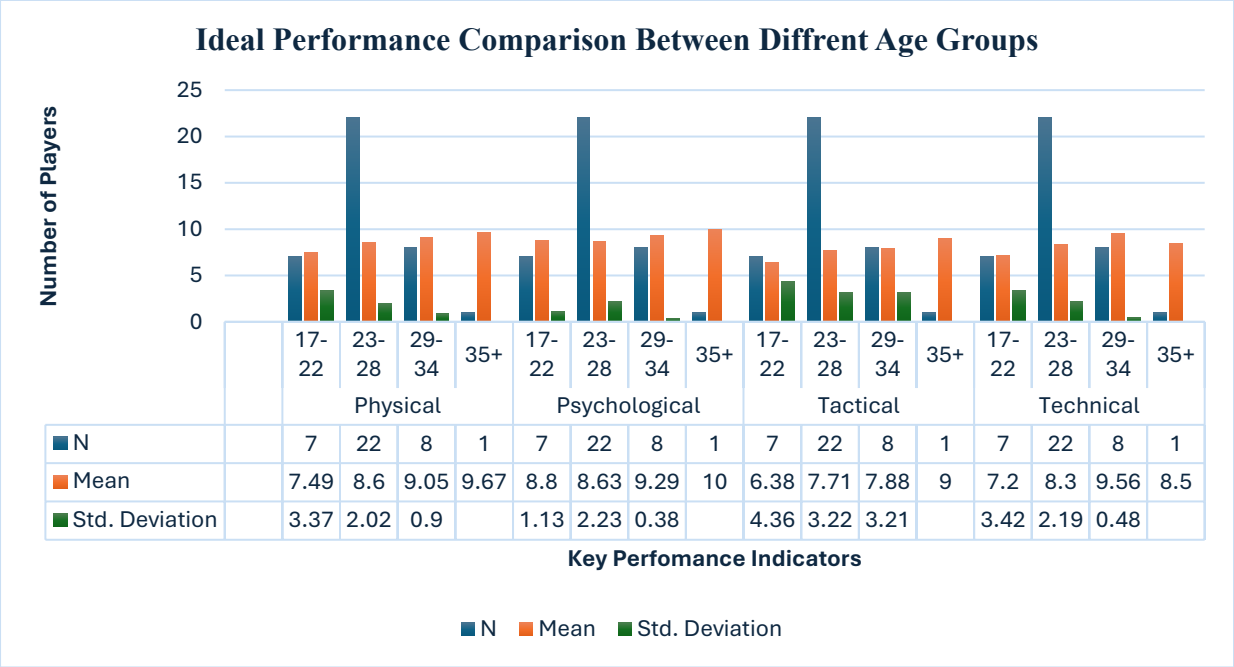

Figure 4.2. *Elite Current Performance by Age Group*

Crucially, the players possess a clear and unified vision of the ideal athlete, evidenced by strong correlations among all ideal performance domains. While a general disconnect exists between current and ideal states, the analysis identified specific developmental pathways. Notably, current tactical and technical skills were significantly correlated with pursuing ideal psychological and tactical attributes, respectively. This suggests that players view mastery of present skills as a foundation for achieving future excellence in specific areas. The most significant performance gaps were observed in Utility Backs, highlighting a particular need for targeted coaching interventions for this player position.

Table 4.7

Elite CP/IP by Playing Position (means, SD, minimum, maximum)

Domain	Prop (n=14)	Hooker (n=4)	Halfback (n=2)	Flyhalf (n=3)	Center (n=4)	Winger (n=6)	Utility Backs (n=5)
CP Physical	7.29 (1.15)	8.04 (1.53)	7.20 (1.13)	7.19 (0.61)	7.61 (0.75)	7.62 (0.95)	7.59 (0.78)

	[4.67–8.67]						
CP Psychological	6.91 (3.18)	8.22 (0.69)	7.50 (0.71)	8.50 (0.87)	7.68 (1.21)	8.14 (1.99)	7.58 (0.30)
CP Tactical	6.65 (2.11)	7.71 (0.58)	7.35 (0.21)	7.67 (0.99)	7.08 (1.07)	6.52 (3.22)	5.65 (3.24)
CP Technical	8.03 (0.98)	8.17 (0.58)	7.38 (0.25)	7.93 (1.10)	6.53 (0.38)	7.15 (0.73)	7.59 (0.44)
IP Physical	8.87 (0.63)	8.70 (0.28)	9.00 (1.41)	6.33 (5.51)	8.88 (0.25)	7.55 (3.80)	9.39 (0.98)
IP Psychological	8.72 (2.57)	9.16 (0.73)	9.13 (0.18)	8.67 (0.58)	9.18 (0.21)	8.31 (2.00)	9.25 (1.10)
IP Tactical	7.82 (3.37)	8.83 (0.58)	8.75 (0.35)	6.22 (5.40)	8.75 (0.30)	4.28 (4.69)	8.94 (1.17)
IP Technical	8.40 (2.56)	8.43 (0.63)	4.69 (6.63)	8.33 (2.08)	9.22 (0.52)	8.21 (1.70)	9.26 (1.14)

Note. Normality assessed with Shapiro–Wilk; where $p < .05$, the-non-parametric test used was Kruskal–Wallis for position. $\alpha = 0.05$.

4.3.2 Summary of Club Level

The performance profiling of the club-level rugby players yielded three primary findings that provide a comprehensive view of their self-perceived abilities and developmental goals.

1. The analysis of demographic factors showed that playing position was not a significant determinant of how players rated their performance. A series of one-way ANOVAs confirmed no statistically significant differences in either Current Performance (CP) or Ideal Performance (IP) ratings among forwards and backs, indicating a relatively uniform self-perception across the various roles on the field (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).

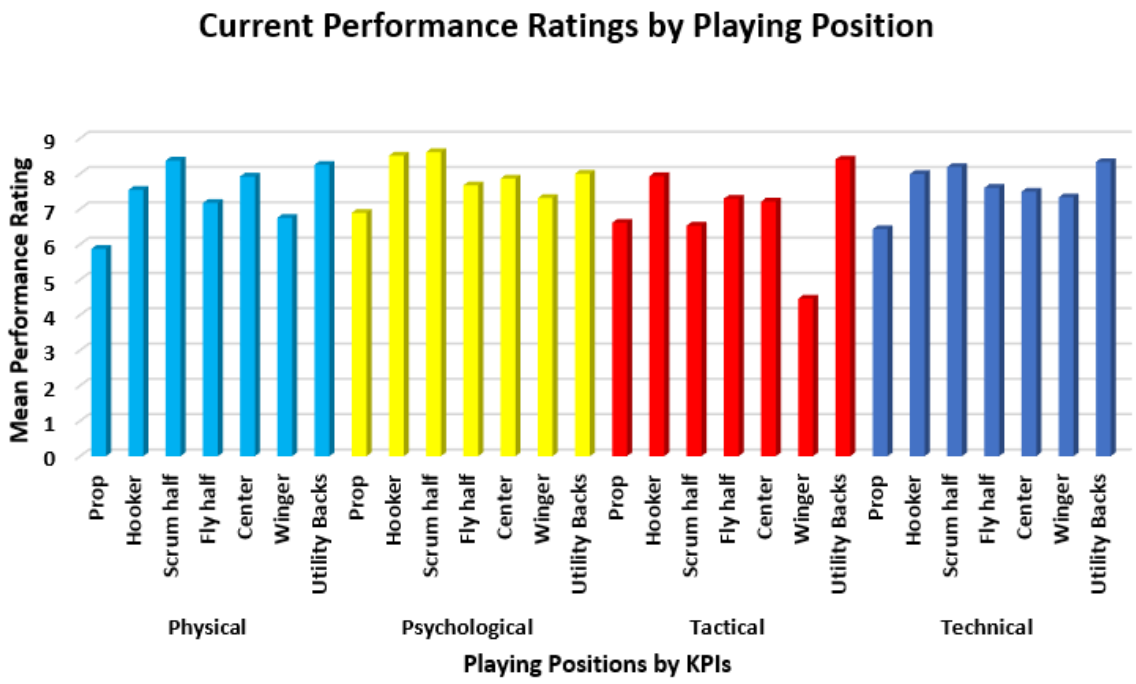

Figure 4.3. *Mean Current Performance (CP) Ratings Across Playing Positions.*

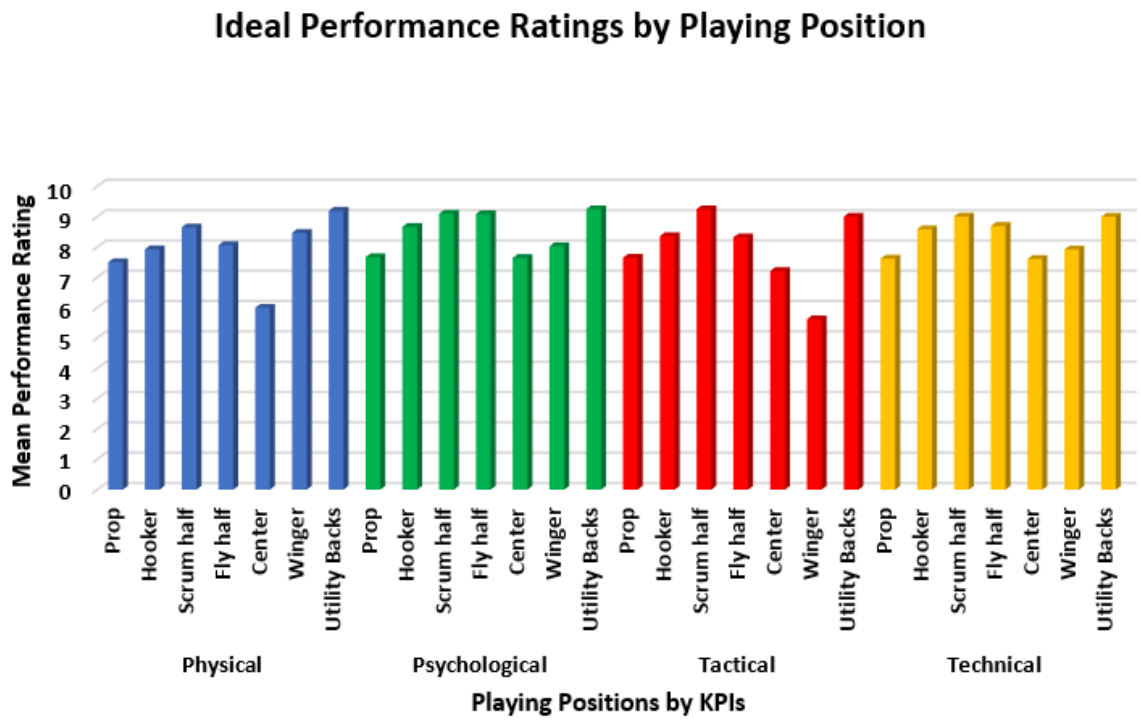

Figure 4.4. *Mean Ideal Performance (IP) Ratings Across Playing Positions*

The central finding was a significant, player-perceived performance gap. A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test revealed that players rated their Ideal Performance as significantly higher than their Current Performance across all four domains: Physical ($p = .005$), Psychological ($p = .013$), Tactical ($p = .001$), and Technical ($p < .001$). This result in Table 4.8 confirms that players are highly aware of the disparity between their abilities and future potential, highlighting a strong intrinsic motivation for improvement.

Table 4.8

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Differences Between Current (CP) and Ideal (IP) Performance Ratings

Key Performance Indicators	**Correlation matrix**		**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**	**z-value**	**p-value**
Physical	IP - CP	Negative Ranks	7	13.64	95.5	**2.821**	**0.005**
		Positive Ranks	23	16.07	369.5		
Psychological	IP - CP	Negative Ranks	9	11.39	102.5	**2.488**	**0.013**
		Positive Ranks	20	16.63	332.5		
Tactical	IP - CP	Negative Ranks	5	8.2	41	**3.271**	**0.001**
		Positive Ranks	20	14.2	284		
Technical	IP - CP	Negative Ranks	5	8.7	43.5	**3.763**	**<.001**
		Positive Ranks	24	16.31	391.5		

Note. The test compares self-rated Current Performance (CP) and Ideal Performance (IP). A significant p-value ($p < .05$) indicates that players perceive a statistically significant gap between their current and ideal performance levels in that domain. The total N varies slightly as the test excludes cases with identical CP and IP scores.

3. Spearman's correlation analysis in Table 4.9 uncovered the interconnected nature of player performance perceptions. Strong positive correlations existed within all current domains and,

even more strongly, within all ideal domains, suggesting players view their current and ideal selves holistically. Crucially, a player's Current Technical skill significantly correlated with all four Ideal Performance domains, suggesting that technical proficiency may be a foundational pillar for a player's confidence and ambition to improve across all other aspects of their game.

Table 4.9

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix for Current and Ideal Performance Domains

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. CP Physical	—							
2. CP Psychological	.61***	—						
3. CP Tactical	.62***	.58***	—					
4. CP Technical	.59***	.63***	.63***	—				
5. IP Physical	.49**	0.2	0.27	.45**	—			
6. IP Psychological	0.1	.39*	0.26	.50**	.52**	—		
7. IP Tactical	0.19	.37*	.42*	.40*	.46**	.81***	—	
8. IP Technical	0.16	0.3	0.34	.57***	.59***	.77***	.61***	—

Note. CP = Current Performance; IP = Ideal Performance.

*p < .05. *p < .01. ***p* < .001.

In summary, the club-level cohort is characterized not by their positional differences but by a shared and significant desire to close the gap between their current and ideal selves. Their perception of performance is highly integrated, with technical skill emerging as a key anchor for their overall developmental aspirations.

4.3.3 Summary of University Level

The university-level cohort presents a clear and consistent profile. These players' self-perceptions are not significantly shaped by their age, gender, or vision of ideal positional requirements. Instead, they are defined by a shared and significant focus on closing the gap between their current and ideal technical abilities.

The results show that players perceive their skills not in isolation, but as a highly integrated system.

Statistically significant positive relationships were found among most CP and IP variables in Table 4.10. Most importantly, a player's Current Technical (CP) skill was strongly and significantly correlated with their Ideal Performance (IP) aspirations across multiple domains:

- IP Physical (roh = .614, p < .001)
- IP Psychological (roh = .601, p < .001)
- IP Technical (roh = .698, p < .001)

Table 4.10

Spearman's Rho Correlation Matrix for Performance Domains

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. CP Physical	—							
2. CP Psychological	.65***	—						
3. CP Tactical	.38*	.57**	—					
4. CP Technical	.55**	.57**	0.31	—				
5. IP Physical	.60***	0.31	0.24	.61***	—			
6. IP Psychological	.45*	.49**	0.3	.60***	.73***	—		
7. IP Tactical	.45*	0.21	0.15	.43*	.76***	.62***	—	
8. IP Technical	.62***	.51**	0.17	.70***	.70***	.70***	.49**	—

Note. CP = Current Performance; IP = Ideal Performance.

*p <.05. *p <.01. ***p* <.001

Furthermore, their current technical proficiency is a foundational element that underpins their confidence and ambition to achieve excellence across all other facets of their game. These findings suggest that coaching and development programs for this level should prioritize technical skill development as a central strategy for fostering holistic player growth.

4.4 Key Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of player interviews provides a deep, culturally-relevant and responsive understanding of the factors shaping performance. Three overarching themes emerged from the data.

1. Players perceive a clear dichotomy in their current abilities. Players identify significant strengths in tactical-cognitive and interpersonal skills such as Communication, Decision-Making, and Game Awareness. Conversely, they report weaknesses in foundational, off-field habits, primarily sleep, recovery, hydration, and nutrition—and specific on-field technical skills like tackling and contest work (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses in Current Performance

Strength (≥ 7)	Count	Short note	Weakness (≤ 6)	Count	Short note
Communication	15	Strong on-field organisation and teamwork	Quality sleep/ Recovery	15	Poor sleep/recovery reduces readiness and energy
Ball catching/ handling	12	Reliable technical control and secure possession	Hydration	10	Inconsistent fluid strategies impairing performance/recovery
Aerial ability	11	Effective in duels, headers, and set-piece situations	Diet/ Nutrition	9	Inadequate or inconsistent fueling affects energy and recovery
Agility	9	Quick footwork, recovery and reaction speed	Concentration/Focus	9	Lapses in attention during key moments
Game awareness	9	Good reading of the play and tactical positioning	Kicking (technique)	8	Weaknesses in kick-offs, grubbers, or lineout throws
Decision-making	8	Consistent choices under pressure	Tackling/ Contest work	8	Needs improvement in 1v1 tackles, jackals, and turnovers
Positioning	7	Occupies effective spaces both offensively/defensively	Energy/ Fatigue control	7	Late-game drop-off; speed-endurance issues
Tackling	6	Strong in 1v1 defensive actions	Discipline/ Recovery habits	6	Inconsistent routines (sleep, hydration, diet) and rest

Endurance	5	Sustains a high work rate across matches	Kicking accuracy/ Passing consistency	5	Technical execution under pressure needs work
Confidence	4	Composed and assertive in challenging situations	Technical/ skill variability	4	Inconsistent technique across specific skills (offload, passing)

Note. NVivo generated Codebook

2. Players articulate a cohesive and integrated model of ideal performance. This ideal is not merely an athlete with better skills, but one who has achieved psychological regulation, tactical command, and technical mastery under pressure, all built upon a foundation of elite physical preparedness (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses in Ideal Performance

Strength (≥ 7)	**Count (n)**	**Short note**	**Weakness (≤ 6)**	**Count (n)**	**Short note**
Decision-making	15	Frequently identified as a core competency that supports tactical execution and quick adaptation.	Continuous passing/ Ball circulation	6	Identified as inconsistent; lapses interrupt momentum and allow defensive resets.
Game awareness / Read the game	14	Regularly cited as an asset enabling correct positioning, anticipation and game control.	One-sided passing/ Predictable distribution	6	Noted as reducing attacking unpredictability and increasing opponent control.
Communication	12	Repeatedly noted as a facilitator of coordinated	Confidence/ Composure	6	Reported as fragile in high-pressure

		defence and set-piece organisation.			moments, leading to hesitation or errors.
Aerial ball skills / Ball catching	12	Often described as a reliable technical strength in contested situations.	Leadership/ Game management	5	Cited as underdeveloped, limiting -field strategic adjustments and cohesion.
Quality sleep / Recovery	11	Commonly referenced as supporting energy, recovery and consistent performance.	Strength/ Power deficits (specific contexts)	5	In some contexts, players reported insufficient contact dominance in rucks/mauls.
Passing both sides	9	Identified as a technical strength that enables balanced attacking options.	Speed/ Acceleration shortfalls	5	Identified as limiting line-break potential and effective chase-backs.
Support play / Working off the ball	9	Noted for enabling sustained phases of the game and improved ball retention.	Support play inconsistencies	4	At times, players failed to provide timely support, increasing turnover risk.
Speed endurance	8	Reported as a physical capacity that underpins repeated high-intensity efforts.	Communication gaps (situational)	4	While communication is a strength overall, situational breakdowns were reported.

Strength / Power	8	Coded frequently as a physical attribute contributing to contact effectiveness.	Decision-making lapses (situational)	3	Although decision-making is generally strong, specific scenarios showed poorer choices.
Ball handling / Passing accuracy	8	Cited as a reliable technical foundation for ball security and attack continuity.	Game awareness lapses (situational)	3	Occasional failures of situational perception were recorded, affecting defensive shape.

Note. NVivo generated Codebook

3. **Data reveal that performance is not achieved in a vacuum** but results are a constant negotiation between athletic demands and sociocultural context. Achieving readiness involves balancing physiological needs with cultural obligations (talanoa, Sunday meals), managing lifestyle pressures (social media), and drawing upon unique psychological pillars like spirituality (lotu) and culturally--relevant and responsive resilience strategies ("if you are tired, don't tired"). This reveals that the path to ideal performance for these players is as much about mastering their off-field environment and internal psychological landscape as it is about perfecting on-field execution.

Another player's account powerfully captures this internal and external struggle, highlighting how social expectations directly compete with recovery protocols:

"As a Fijian, my family and village obligations come first. After a tough training week, you're expected at the talanoa session. The kava bowl goes around for hours. You want to be hydrated for Monday's session, but you know the grog is dehydrating you, and you won't sleep early. It's a constant battle between culture and conditioning." (Player 63)

This narrative reveals that the gap in physical preparedness is not simply a matter of individual choice or lack of knowledge. It is a complex negotiation between an athlete's identity as a community member and their identity as a high-performance athlete, where fulfilling the duties of one role directly undermines the requirements of the other.

4.5 APPQ Analysis

The most significant finding was the tool's consistent reception across gender and playing position. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences for any measured construct between male and female athletes, nor among the various positions on the field (e.g., Prop, Winger, Center). This demonstrates that the tool's fundamental value in areas like improving self-awareness and the coach-athlete process is universally applicable within a diverse team environment.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the overall perceptions of the performance profiling process. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each of the four reliable thematic constructs and four key standalone items are presented in Table 4.13.

The table shows that the results indicate an overwhelmingly positive assessment from the athletes across all measured areas. The mean scores for the thematic constructs were all exceptionally high, with Motivation and Confidence receiving the highest rating (M = 2.96, SD = 0.15), followed closely by Goal Setting (M = 2.95, SD = 0.15), Improving the Coach-Athlete Process (M = 2.94, SD = 0.20), and Enhanced Self-Awareness (M = 2.93, SD = 0.18).

Table 4.13

Descriptive Statistics for Thematic Constructs and Standalone Items

Construct / Item	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Thematic Constructs			
Improving Coach-Athlete Process	100	2.94	0.2
Enhanced Self-Awareness & Role Clarity	100	2.93	0.18
Application for Development & Goal Setting	100	2.95	0.15
Motivation & Confidence	100	2.96	0.15
Key Standalone Items			
It helped to get something down on paper	100	2.83	0.43
To take more control of my development	100	2.95	0.22
To take more responsibility for my development	100	2.93	0.29
To improve the coach's understanding of me	100	2.97	0.17

Note: Scores were measured on a 3-point Likert scale where 3 indicates the highest level of agreement.

However, significant and insightful variances emerged when segmenting the athletes by playing level and age:

- ***Playing Level***: The most pronounced differences were found here. Elite-level athletes consistently derived greater value from the tool's more advanced functions. Specifically, they scored significantly higher than their Club and University counterparts on constructs related to Goal Setting and feeling empowered "to take more control of their development." This suggests that while the tool is beneficial for all, its capacity to foster strategic, long-term athlete autonomy is most profoundly realized at the highest level of competition.
- ***Age***: While perceptions were largely consistent across age groups, a unique and significant difference was found in the Motivation and Confidence construct. Athletes in the 35+ age group reported significantly lower scores on this measure than younger athletes, indicating that the tool's impact on motivation may vary across an athlete's career lifespan.

In summary, the APPQ analysis provides strong evidence that the performance profiling tool is a robust instrument with broad appeal. Its core benefits are recognized equally regardless of gender or position, but the experience and needs of elite-level athletes amplify its most strategic advantages.

4.6 Discussion

The foundational quantitative finding was the universal and statistically significant gap between athletes' Current Performance (CP) and their Ideal Performance (IP) across all domains, confirming that a powerful "developmental reserve" exists within players. However, the analysis revealed that the architecture of these performance profiles is most powerfully shaped not by competitive level, but by Playing Position, Age, and Gender.

The convergent qualitative data provided profound explanatory depth, identifying a "sociocultural-physiological conflict" as a central mechanism driving these performance gaps. The findings illustrate that an athlete's physical readiness is constantly negotiated with cultural obligations, reframing performance deficiencies as systemic challenges rather than individual failings. Furthermore, psychological resilience was found to be deeply interwoven with spiritual beliefs, adding a critical, often-overlooked dimension to athlete support.

Findings establish that performance is not a linear progression of isolated skills but the management of a complex, interconnected system where on-field demands intersect with off-

field cultural and personal realities. The findings validate the performance profiling tool as a highly effective diagnostic instrument capable of producing nuanced, athlete-centered data.

4.6.1 The Developmental Trajectory: Comparative Analysis Across Levels

The central finding of this analysis is that a player's performance profile is most significantly shaped by their Playing Position, followed by their Age and Gender. Surprisingly, the player's competitive Playing Level (Elite, Club, or University) did not show a statistically significant difference in self-perceived performance.

Key discussions:

- ***Playing Position is Dominant***: Position is the most powerful factor because different roles in rugby (e.g., props vs. halfbacks) have vastly different physical, technical, and cognitive demands. This finding aligns strongly with existing rugby research.
- ***Age Shows a Lifecycle Pattern***: The data reveals that different priorities emerge at different career stages. Players in their mid-20s reported peaks in areas like strength and decision-making, while players over 35 noted declines in physical endurance, consistent with patterns of maturation and experience.
- ***Gender Influences Self-Perception***: There were notable differences in how male and female athletes rated their own skills. For example, female players perceived themselves as stronger in tactical strategy and "guts," while male players rated themselves higher in attitude and catching. This suggests a need for gender-responsive coaching.
- ***Playing Level Was Not a Differentiator***: The lack of significant differences between Elite, Club, and University players suggests that athletes across this high-performance pathway share a relatively uniform perception of performance standards. The specific demands of their position are a more critical factor than their current competitive tier.

Performance is multifactorial, but it is an athlete's on-field role, life experience (age), and gender that primarily shape their developmental needs, more so than the level they play in.

4.6.2 The Developmental Trajectory: Comparative Analysis Across KPIs

This synthesis outlines the performance trajectory for Fiji Rugby Sevens players by integrating findings across four distinct yet interconnected domains:

1. ***Technical Domain (The Pursuit of Consistency):*** Player development is not linear. University players face a competence gap (needing foundational skills), Club players have a consistency gap (needing to execute reliably under pressure), and Elite players

have an optimization gap (needing to refine specialized skills for marginal gains). This pattern indicates a pathway-specific trajectory rather than a simple, linear climb through tiers. The emphasis on consistent, accurate execution resonates with sport-science discussions of marginal gains achieved through improved skill execution under competition constraints (Darrall-Jones et al., 2015; Voss et al., 2010).

2. ***Tactical Domain (From Knowledge to Instinct)***: This domain is a key differentiator. Elite performance is defined by the ability to translate strategic knowledge into rapid, intuitive, and context-appropriate decisions during high-speed play, a skill underpinned by advanced perceptual-cognitive processing. Visual-perceptual and cognitive-load considerations are central to tactical execution, with perceptual-motor integration underpinning the ability to identify opportunities and adapt to evolving on-field contexts (Millard et al., 2020, 2024).
3. ***Physical Domain (The Foundation of Readiness)***: A significant gap in physical readiness exists across the pathway. This domain is the prerequisite for all others and encompasses not just conditioning but holistic readiness, including nutrition, recovery, and lifestyle management, with needs varying by playing position. Position-specific anthropometric and physical profiles across age groups further support that physical preparedness is foundational and variably manifested across roles (Darrall-Jones et al., 2015; McCormack et al., 2020).
4. ***Psychological Domain (The Enabler of Potential)***: This stabilising factor allows players to apply their skills under pressure. While essential, the literature presents a complex and contradictory picture of long-term outcomes, with some studies showing cognitive resilience post-career and others documenting significant mental health challenges like anxiety, depression, and concussion-related issues, underscoring the need for tailored psychological support and monitoring (Gallo et al., 2017; Hind et al., 2022; Hume et al., 2022; Ojio et al., 2021; Van Patten et al., 2021).

A player's performance profile is a holistic integration of these four domains. Playing position is the primary factor shaping specific competencies, moderated by age and gender. This integrated perspective aligns with sports science literature and underscores the need for balanced, individualized development programs that prioritize long-term mental health and well-being.

4.6.3 Thematic Analysis: Unpacking the 'Why' Behind the Numbers:

4.6.3.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of Current Performance – A Profile of Strengths and Weaknesses in Performance

This theme reveals a distinct dichotomy in how players view their abilities: they perceive their strengths predominantly in tactical-cognitive and interpersonal areas, while their weaknesses are concentrated in foundational off-field habits and specific on-field technical skills.

Qualitative Evidence:

- ***Strengths (Tactical-Cognitive & Interpersonal)***: Players consistently identified their primary assets as cognitive skills that support on-field organization and teamwork. These include high levels of Communication, Game Awareness, and Decision-Making. One player described this as an "*intuitive, culturally ingrained communication style*" that reinforcing collective trust and resilience on the field.
- ***Weaknesses (Foundational & Technical)***: The most frequently cited weaknesses were not complex on-field strategies but fundamental, off-field behaviours. Poor sleep/recovery, inconsistent hydration, and inadequate diet/nutrition were reported as the most pervasive issues affecting their readiness and energy.

  On the field, weaknesses were concentrated in specific technical areas, such as inconsistent tackling and contest/turnover work. One player vividly captured this challenge:

"In defence, I get confused when the opposition uses decoy runners. I either overcommit or freeze".

This qualitative theme provides the crucial explanatory context, the "why" for the quantitative performance gaps identified earlier in the study.

1. Physical Gap: The players' reports of struggling with foundational readiness explain the significant quantitative gap between current and ideal physical performance ($Z = -3.87$, $p < .001$). Their self-identified sleep, hydration, and nutrition weaknesses directly account for why their physical state is not at its ideal level, moving the issue from a simple training deficit to a more complex lifestyle and cultural challenge.

2. Technical Gap: The quantitative data show a large and significant gap in the technical domain ($Z = -3.23$, $p = .001$). The qualitative findings explain that this gap is not due to a lack of knowledge, but to inconsistency in execution under pressure. Players' reports of struggling

with specific skills like tackling and contest work provide a concrete reason for the numerically observed deficit.

3. Tactical Gap: The quantitative tactical gap (Z = -2.80, p = .005) is given depth and meaning by the qualitative data. The player's quote about "freezing" when facing decoy runners illustrates the cognitive friction that leads to defensive errors. This shows that the tactical gap is not just a number but a real-time, on-field struggle with decision-making under pressure, linking a technical weakness (indecision) directly to a tactical challenge (reading the play).

In summary, this first theme resolves a potential paradox: how can players be tactically astute yet still have significant performance gaps? The answer is that their innate cognitive strengths (like game awareness) are undermined by foundational weaknesses in physical readiness and specific technical execution, providing a holistic explanation for the patterns seen in the quantitative data.

4.6.3.2 Theme 2: The Sociocultural-Physiological Conflict

This theme profoundly illustrates that performance readiness is a "constant negotiation between off-field lifestyle factors, cultural obligations, and physiological demands" for a Fijian athlete. Literature establishes that rugby in Fiji is not merely a sport but a "*cultural cornerstone*" and a physical expression of social values like unity, community, and identity (Guinness & Besnier, 2016; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013). The qualitative findings show that the very practices that strengthen this cultural fabric—communal gatherings (talanoa), shared meals, and strong family bonds—are the primary sources of physiological disruption.

This creates what one athlete powerfully termed "*a constant battle between culture and conditioning*". Therefore, the significant quantitative gap in the physical domain (Z = -3.87, p < .001) cannot be interpreted as a simple failure of individual athletes to follow recovery protocols. Instead, it manifests a systemic challenge where cultural identity and athletic demands intersect.

This insight has critical implications for coaching and support. Interventions based on generic sleep hygiene or nutrition advice are likely to fail because they do not account for the cultural weight of these conflicting practices. As the literature on Fijian rugby suggests, the sport is deeply embedded in the vaka-i-taukei (the Fijian way of life). To be effective, support strategies must be culturally sensitive, acknowledging and respecting these sociocultural realities while collaborating with players, families, and community leaders to balance tradition and the non-negotiable requirements of high-performance sport.

4.6.4 Synthesis of Integrated Findings

The Fijian Performance Ecosystem

In synthesizing the insights, a holistic model of Fijian player performance emerges. It is a profile defined by:

- A core of exceptional tactical-cognitive strength serves as the engine of their on-field success.
- A layer of foundational vulnerabilities in off-field habits and specific technical execution creates performance gaps.
- An overarching sociocultural context that both nurtures their unique strengths and creates the primary obstacles to mitigating their weaknesses.

Furthermore, this integrated model explains why Playing Position emerged as a more significant differentiator of performance profiles than Playing Level. A player's on-field role dictates the specific expression of these strengths and vulnerabilities within the broader performance ecosystem.

Bridging the CP-IP gap for Fiji Rugby 7s players is not about adding new layers of complex strategy but strengthening the foundations upon which their innate brilliance is built. The path to ideal performance requires holistic, culturally-relevant and responsive interventions that help players navigate the delicate balance between their vibrant cultural identity and the uncompromising physiological demands of modern elite sport.

4.6.5 APPQ – The Performance Profiling Tool

The evaluation of the performance profiling intervention demonstrates its dual value. It is not only a robust diagnostic tool for research but also a powerful pedagogical instrument in applied practice. By systematically enhancing self-awareness and promoting autonomy, it serves as a catalyst for creating a high-performance environment where athletes are active and engaged partners in their own development.

5 CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Original Contribution

This thesis makes its most significant contribution not by merely quantifying the performance gaps in Fiji Rugby 7s players, but by reconceptualizing their origin through a culturally-relevant and responsive framework.

The central finding is the existence of a "sociocultural-physiological conflict," which articulates the persistent tension between the rigorous recovery and conditioning protocols essential for elite performance and the non-negotiable obligations of Fijian culture, such as community gatherings and family responsibilities.

This reframes persistent physical deficits not as individual failings of discipline, but as manifestations of a systemic challenge where cultural identity and athletic demands intersect.

Furthermore, the study resolves the apparent paradox of players exhibiting high psychological resilience alongside performance gaps by revealing that this fortitude is profoundly anchored in deeply held spiritual beliefs. Faith emerges as a powerful buffer against anxiety, operating independently of technical proficiency.

By identifying these dynamics, this research challenges conventional performance models and provides a new, culturally sensitive interpretive lens for understanding the lived reality of the Pasifika athlete. It validates the mixed-methods performance profiling tool as a powerful diagnostic instrument capable of uncovering the complex truths that define performance in this unique context.

5.2 Summary of Findings and Discussions

5.2.1 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

The following table summarizes the quantitative outcomes of the study, systematically addressing each of the research hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Null Hypothesis (H_0)	Result (Outcome of Null Hypothesis)	Summary of Findings and Discussion
H1a: A significant gap exists between Current Performance (CP) and Ideal Performance (IP).	There is no significant difference between CP and IP scores.	**Accepted**	The findings strongly support the null hypothesis. No statistically significant gaps in the mean scores for any of the measured Current Performance (CP) or Ideal Performance (IP) competencies based on playing level, suggesting that, within this cohort of athletes, self-perception of these specific physical, psychological, technical, and tactical skills does not vary significantly with their competitive standing.
H1b: Gender influences CP and IP ratings.	There is no significant difference in CP and IP scores based on gender (H_0-1b).	**Rejected**	Strong support was found for the alternative hypothesis (HA-1b). The results from independent samples t-tests confirmed that performance ratings differ significantly between genders.
H1c: Playing position influences CP and IP ratings.	There is no significant difference in CP and IP scores based on playing position (H_0-1c).	**Rejected**	The evidence overwhelmingly supports the rejection of the null hypothesis. The analysis consistently demonstrated that the mean scores for both CP and IP differ significantly across playing positions.
H1d: Age influences CP and IP ratings.	There is no significant difference in CP and IP scores based on age (H_0-1d).	**Rejected**	Based on robust findings from the ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative (HA-1d). Significant age-related differences were found, particularly in physical KPI.
H2a: Performance gaps are moderated by playing level.	Performance gaps in player profile clusters are *not* significantly associated with Playing Level (H_0-2a)	**Accepted**	This finding suggests that athletes' self-perceptions and the nature of their CP-IP gaps do not vary and are relatively consistent across these competitive levels. The data did not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null.
H2b: Performance gaps are moderated by playing position.	Performance gaps in player profile clusters are *not* significantly associated with Playing Position (H_0-2b).	**Rejected**	Results revealed that Utility Backs had significantly larger CP-IP gaps in tactical skills compared to Prop forwards ($p < .01$) and Centers ($p < .05$). This finding underscores the specialized cognitive and decision-making demands placed on this position, highlighting a direct link between playing position and the specific nature and magnitude of performance gaps.
RQ3 How effective is the performance profiling	Null (H0-3) APPQ scores (e.g., self-	**Rejected**	Alternative (HA-3): APPQ scores indicate a positive appraisal, showing

process as a tool for enhancing player self-awareness and intention to act within the Fijian cultural context? (Objective iii)	awareness, intention to act) do not indicate a positive appraisal of the performance profiling process.		improvement in self-awareness and intention to act following the performance profiling process. This suggests that athletes, in general, experienced an improvement in self-awareness and showed a positive intention to act following the performance profiling intervention.

5.2.2 Summary of Qualitative Findings and Discussions

This table details the core qualitative themes, describing the key insights derived from athlete narratives and explaining their broader implications for coaching and player development.

Qualitative Theme	Description of Findings & Key Insights	Discussion & Implications
1. The Developmental Pathway of Performance Perception	The qualitative data revealed a clear developmental progression in how players perceive performance gaps. **University Players:** Focused on foundational **technical** skills (e.g., passing, tackling) as the primary area for improvement. **Club Players:** Broadened their focus to include both **technical** proficiency and emerging **tactical** awareness. **Elite Players:** Concentrated on highly specialized **tactical** and **psychological** skills (e.g., decision-making under pressure, game management), having already mastered the foundational technical elements.	This finding validates a stage-based model of athlete development. It implies that coaching interventions must be tailored to the competitive level of the athlete. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is ineffective; coaches should prioritize fundamental skills for emerging players and shift to higher-order cognitive and psychological skills for elite athletes.
2. The Primacy of Technical & Tactical Integration	Players consistently emphasized that **technical skill is the non-negotiable foundation** upon which all other performance domains are built. They described how tactical execution is impossible without technical proficiency. The two were seen as deeply intertwined, with tactical awareness being the application	This theme reinforces the critical importance of mastering fundamentals at all levels. It suggests that even at the elite level, a breakdown in tactical execution can often be traced back to a failure in a core technical skill under pressure. For coaches, this highlights the need for continuous reinforcement of basic skills while simultaneously developing tactical understanding.

	of technical skills in a game context.	
3. The Sociocultural-Physiological Conflict	A significant and unique theme was the conflict between off-field **sociocultural obligations** (e.g., family, community, religious commitments) and the on-field physiological requirements of an elite athlete (e.g., nutrition, sleep, recovery). Players described the immense difficulty in balancing these competing demands, which directly impacted their physical readiness and performance.	This is a critical insight for athlete management, particularly within the Fijian context. It demonstrates that performance is not created in a vacuum and is profoundly influenced by the athlete's external environment. Support staff and coaches must adopt a holistic and culturally sensitive approach, helping players navigate these off-field pressures to ensure they can meet on-field performance standards.
4. Performance as an Integrated, Holistic System	The qualitative narratives powerfully supported the quantitative finding that performance domains are interconnected. Players described a dynamic system where a deficit in one area directly compromises another. For example, they noted that poor **physical** conditioning led to a decline in **technical** execution and poor **tactical** decision-making under fatigue.	This finding challenges the practice of training performance domains in isolation. It suggests that development programs should be integrated, combining, for instance, conditioning drills with complex decision-making tasks. Understanding this interconnectedness allows coaches to identify the root cause of a performance issue rather than just treating the symptom.
5. Enhanced Self-Awareness and Athlete Ownership	The performance profiling process itself was identified as a powerful developmental tool. Athletes reported that it was the first time they had systematically reflected on their strengths and weaknesses. This process fostered a deep sense of **self-awareness**, gave them a clear language to communicate their needs to coaches, and engendered a feeling of **ownership** and control over their athletic journey.	The utility of performance profiling extends beyond data collection; it is an intervention in itself. By empowering athletes to become active participants in their own development, the tool can enhance intrinsic motivation, improve the quality of coach-athlete dialogue, and lead to more targeted and effective goal-setting.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

For Practice: Actionable Recommendations for Stakeholders

1. For Coaches and High-Performance Staff:

- Adopt a Differentiated Coaching Framework: A "one-size-fits-all" approach is suboptimal. Coaching must be tailored to the developmental level and position. For university-level players, this means prioritizing foundational technical skills, while for elite players, the focus should shift to tactical execution under pressure, particularly for Utility Backs.
- Integrate Performance Profiling Longitudinally: Performance profiling should become a regular, cyclical practice (pre-, mid-, and post-season) to establish dynamic Individual Development Plans (IDPs), foster athlete autonomy, and objectively track progress over time.
- Address the Sociocultural-Physiological Conflict Head-On: Coaches and staff must move beyond ignoring this conflict. This involves educating players on physiological demands while respecting their cultural context and using collaborative dialogues (talanoa) to help athletes navigate these dual pressures.

2. For Players:

- Foster Proactive Ownership of Development: Athletes are encouraged to use their performance profiles as a career roadmap to set goals and seek feedback, shifting from passive recipients to active drivers of their development.
- Emphasise Off-Field Professionalism: Players must recognize that performance enhancement extends beyond the pitch. Developing robust routines around sleep hygiene, nutrition, and mental recovery is fundamental for closing performance gaps.

For Program Administrators and the Fiji Rugby Union (FRU):

- Establish a Formalized Tertiary-Level Development Pathway: The study's most critical structural recommendation is to bridge the significant gap between the secondary school system and senior elite rugby. This model involves:
    - Formal Partnership: Creating an official partnership between the FRU, universities, and the Fiji University Sports Association (FUSA) to create a sanctioned and scouted development tier.

- University High-Performance Hubs: Establishing FRU-accredited hubs within partner universities to provide student-athletes with elite coaching, strength and conditioning, and sport science support on campus.
- Holistic Support: Ensuring these hubs provide academic and career support to address the dual-career demands on student-athletes, thereby retaining more talent within the system.

For Theory: Methodological Contribution

This thesis demonstrates the indispensable value of a pragmatist, convergent parallel mixed-methods design for sport science research in culturally specific contexts. The synergy between quantitative and qualitative data was crucial for uncovering the study's most significant findings, the "sociocultural-physiological conflict" and the role of spirituality, which would have remained invisible to a single-method approach. By employing an athlete-centered tool with high ecological validity, the research ensures that performance metrics are meaningful to the athletes rather than imposed by the researcher. This study exemplifies culturally-relevant and inclusive performance analysis, offering a methodological blueprint for generating deep, actionable insights in other high-performance environments where culture and sport are deeply intertwined.

5.4 Limitations

Acknowledging the study's limitations are essential for contextualizing its findings and guiding future inquiry.

i. The study's cross-sectional design captures significant associations but cannot establish causality.
ii. Using a Likert-type scale generates ordinal data, a limitation mitigated by robust non-parametric analyses.
iii. Segmentation of the data resulted in small subgroups, limiting the statistical power for specific inferential claims.
iv. The deep focus on Fijian cultural norms prioritizes contextual understanding over broad generalizability to other cultures.

5.5 Future Research Directions

- ***Longitudinal Studies***: A longitudinal approach is needed to track the convergence of CP and IP over time to determine if targeted interventions based on IDPs lead to measurable on-field success.
- ***Experimental Comparison of Training***: An experimental study comparing integrated (holistic) versus siloed training paradigms could provide causal evidence for the most effective coaching pedagogy.
- ***Development of Position-Specific Tools***: Future research could collaborate with elite coaches to develop refined, position-specific profiling instruments with tailored Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to allow for more precise interventions

5.6 Concluding Statement

This research began as an effort to understand the developmental needs of Fiji Rugby 7s players; it concludes by revealing that performance is not simply a product of training and talent, but a deeply personal negotiation between a world-class athlete and their cultural identity. By giving voice to the athlete, this thesis provides a diagnostic tool for the coach, a strategic roadmap for the administrator, and a new, culturally-relevant and responsive lens for the sport scientist. It affirms that to build the future of Fiji Rugby 7s, one must coach the player on the field and understand the person off it. By illuminating this critical path from individual self-awareness to systemic excellence, this work provides a robust foundation for the next chapter in the evolution of Fiji Rugby 7s.

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Appendice

Appendix 1 – Performance Profiling Grid

Rugby union player performance profile example

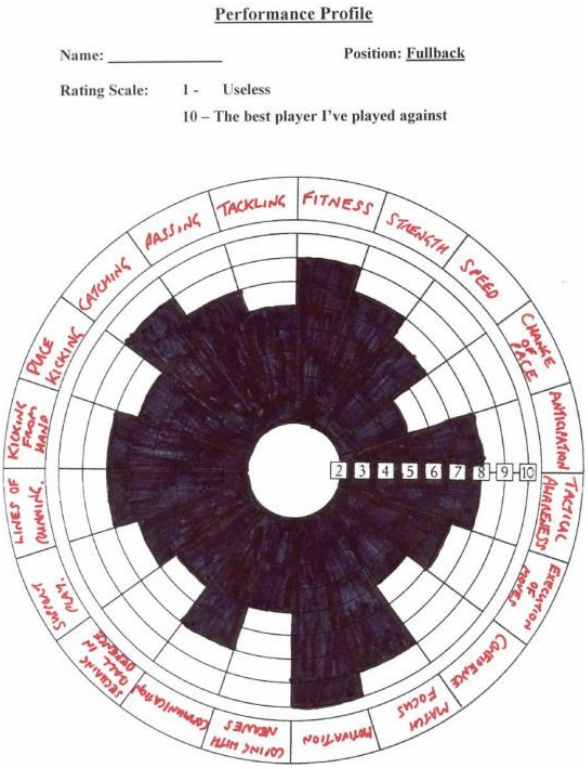

Figure 5.1. *Completed Performance Profiling Grid Template (Weston et al., 2011)*

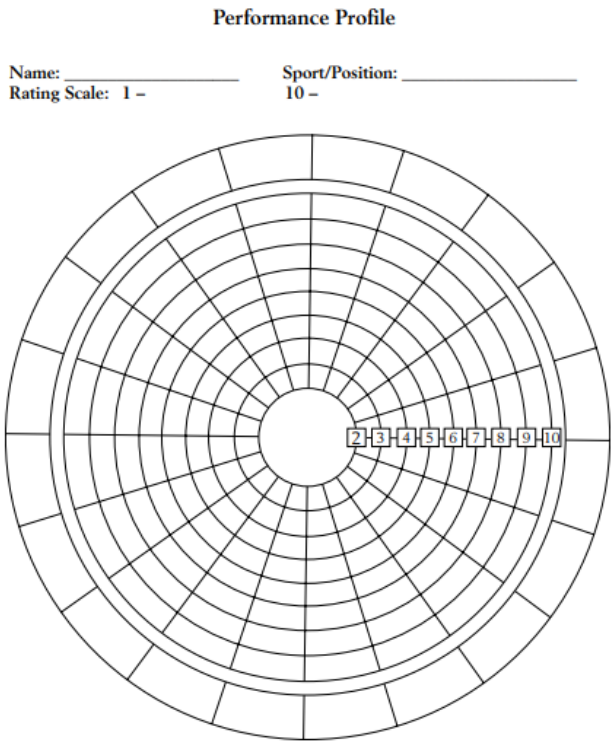

Figure 6.2 Blank performance profile template.

Figure 5.2. *Performance Profiling Grid Template (Weston et al., 2011)*

Appendix 2 - Athlete performance profile questionnaire (APPQ) by Weston et al., 2011

Athlete Performance Profile Questionnaire
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to evaluate the impact of using the performance profile from an athlete perspective. All the questions relate to aspects of the process of completing your own performance profile.
The questionnaire does not require your name and therefore all responses are completely confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer every question as honestly as possible relating to the session you have just been involved in. If you do not understand the meaning of any of the questions, please ask the researcher for an explanation.

Background Information

Gender:

Age:

Position:

Have you ever participated in a performance profile session before? Please circle Yes or No below.

YES NO

If yes, where, when and by whom was the session taken?

_____

_____

(i) Generally, how useful did you find the performance profile to be? Please circle appropriate number.

Not At All		Moderately	Very Much		Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5	6

(ii) How much do you believe that you would benefit from participating in a similar session in the future?

Not At All		Moderately	Very Much		Don't Know
1	2	3	4	5	6

(iii) Please indicate, on the scale provided, the level of impact the performance profiling session had on the following:

	Not At All		Moderately	Very Much		Don't Know
Helped to highlight my strengths	1	2	3	4	5	6
Helped to highlight my weaknesses	1	2	3	4	5	6
Helped to highlight the demands of my position	1	2	3	4	5	6
It helped to get something down on paper	1	2	3	4	5	6
It helped highlight strategies to improve	1	2	3	4	5	6
It helped to enhance my confidence in my ability	1	2	3	4	5	6
It was a catalyst to help improve myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
It made me think about setting goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
Helped to highlight the demands of other positions	1	2	3	4	5	6

(iv) Please indicate on the scale provided the extent you would benefit from using the performance profile in the future:

	Not At All		Moderately	Very Much		Don't Know
To build my confidence	1	2	3	4	5	6
To help me decide what I need to work on	1	2	3	4	5	6
To monitor my progress	1	2	3	4	5	6
To aid communication with my coach	1	2	3	4	5	6
To set goals for myself	1	2	3	4	5	6
To take more control of my development	1	2	3	4	5	6
To motivate me to train						
To motivate me to improve	1	2	3	4	5	6
To structure my training schedule	1	2	3	4	5	6
To help in the evaluation of my performance	1	2	3	4	5	6
To help the coach individualise my training	1	2	3	4	5	6
To improve the coach's understanding of me	1	2	3	4	5	6
To provide after game analysis	1	2	3	4	5	6
To record my improvements	1	2	3	4	5	6
3To take more responsibility for my development	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for completing this questionnaire